

# Stem stress and ace the exam

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Divya is now in her first year in National Junior College and is sitting the AO level Mandarin paper in November.

She says: "Sometimes I get lost in my work, or I insist on finishing more, and she or my grandfather will come up and insist I go for a walk with them, or at least watch TV."

Dr Kee, who is also a psychologist with the Ministry of Health's Child Guidance Centre, adds: "Relaxation gives your brain the chance to organise the information you have just encountered — it sinks in and can be filed away, leaving you a clearer space to add more information."

Both teachers and doctors suggest a short break every 45 minutes to an hour.

Taking time off to exercise also stimulates the brain cells and keeps you alert.

Your psychological and emotional health are also vital to surviving the cram season.

Some may not be — or may not feel — very well-prepared. But panicking will not help.

First off, you do not have all the time in the world left, so

set realistic and achievable goals, both in terms of the amount you plan to cover, and results you expect.

Sometimes, if time is really running out, your best option is to prioritise, says Dr Kee. Concentrate on the topics that are most important, you know best and can bank on, and are compulsory.

And then you have to work hard at thinking positively.

Rishi offers: "Don't focus on what you don't know. In all probability, you know enough to get yourself through the paper, even if not spectacularly. Focus on that."

"If you're just 70 per cent prepared, panicking is only going to worsen those odds."

Parents could step in here as well. Dr Kee explains: "They need to provide emotional support. Remind your kids of past successes and recognise their efforts and the fact that they are being responsible for themselves."

Says Divya: "Sometimes, the best thing they could do is to just tell us that our best is all they ask for. We're stressed enough, we don't need any

more stress."

Even simple gestures like waking your child up for the paper, dropping them at school and leaving lines of communication open for them could help.

Other tips A-students add for the day of the exam include boosting your self-confidence, getting enough sleep the night before your paper and staying away from people who are over-anxious because "anxiety is contagious".

And if you find yourself blanking out or panicking during the paper, stop and sit back, breathe deeply and calm yourself down. If necessary, go and wash your face. Then approach the paper again.

If something is unfamiliar, skip it and chalk up the "easy marks" first, says Divya, because they really do add up.

"You need to psych yourself into believing that you know what you need to, because you probably do," she says.

"You need to have that self-confidence, because that's 80 per cent of the battle won."